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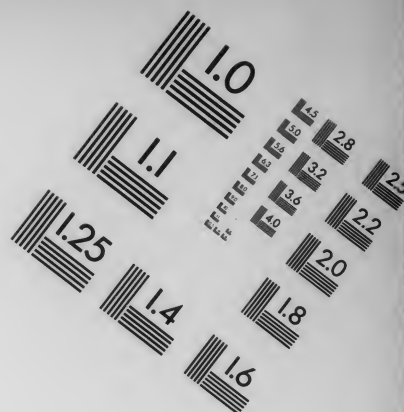
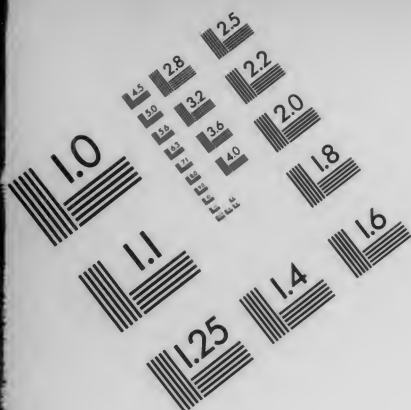


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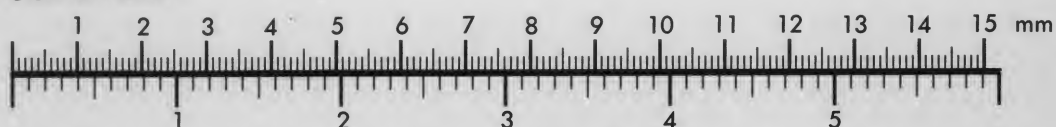
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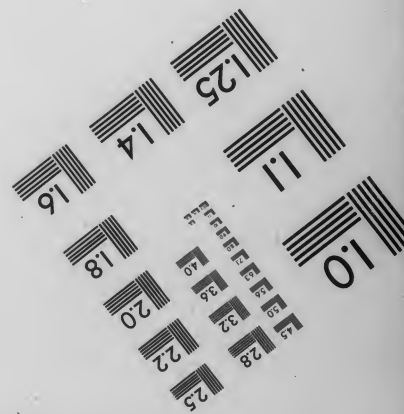
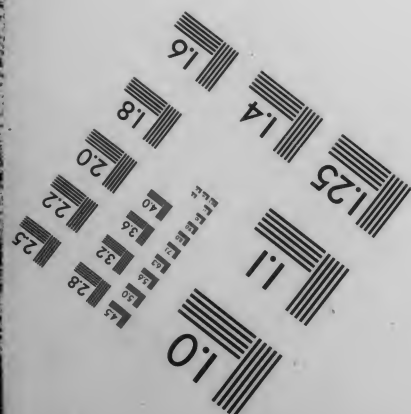
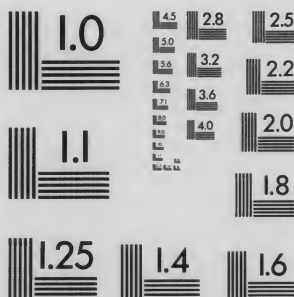
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HORACE'S *PROPEMPTICON* TO VIRGIL

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PRINTED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

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## HORACE'S PROPEMPTICON TO VIRGIL

By G. L. HENDRICKSON  
The University of Chicago

Some years ago, on the appearance of Professor C. H. Moore's excellent edition of the *Odes* of Horace, I was struck by a remark introductory to the *Propempticon* to Virgil (i. 3):

It is remarkable that after the first eight verses which contain the propempticon proper, Horace, who was usually so tactful, should quickly revert to the old philosophical and theological notions of the sinfulness of human enterprise without observing how out of place such ideas were here, when Virgil was just about to show such enterprise by undertaking this voyage.

The feeling of the editor I could well enough understand, but I felt that in some degree he had missed the significance of the reflections on man's audacity, and their relation to the preceding prayer for the safe delivery of Virgil to the shores of Attica.

My own conception of the matter had been that these reflections, though put in the enunciative form, were in reality an expression of grief, an imprecation upon man's audacious enterprise, which had devised the means of separating friends. This explanation is adequate and, as it seems to me, natural. It was entertained by the author of the Pseudo-Acronian scholia,<sup>1</sup> and of modern editors, I find it is presented by L. Müller, and probably by others. Yet it must be said that, whether because of its obviousness or because the connection has been missed, it is not found in many of the commentaries to which I have referred. Even Kiessling, who was by far the most penetrating of Horatian editors in questions of literary usage and convention, failed to point out the real significance of the second part of the poem and its conformity to the traditions of this literary type.<sup>2</sup> But the matter was dismissed, and only recalled to mind on receiving the last number of *Wiener Studien* (XXIX, p. 165), in which an Austrian scholar, Dr. K. Prodinger, without referring to Moore and probably independ-

<sup>1</sup> *Athenas naviganti Vergilio navigii prosperitatem precatur et execratur etiam timore periculi illum qui primus . . . ad lemeritatem navigandi descendit.*

<sup>2</sup> "Uebrigens ist die Ode weniger Gelegenheitsgedicht, als vielmehr lyrischer Erguss über die Vermessenheit menschlichen Strebens."

ently of him, insists on the tactlessness of Horace in holding before Virgil the tale of man's impiety, complains of the lack of connection between the two parts of the ode, finds that interpreters are helpless in the face of it, and finally concludes that we have here two entirely separate poems. This conclusion of course need scarcely be taken seriously, but the partial coincidence of his criticisms with those of Professor Moore suggests that a certain incongruity may have been felt here by other readers of Horace, and will perhaps justify an effort to point out the exact nature of the "tactlessness" of which Horace is guilty, and the place of such utterances in poems of this kind.

The situation which the propempticon presents is of two friends or lovers whose happiness in each other is broken into by the necessity of separation. The one who is left behind prays of course for the safe journey of the other, but he does it with an anxious and foreboding heart, unreconciled to the thought of separation. His mood is not one of cheering farewell and of reassuring hopes, but of grief and protestation. The elements of the propempticon, therefore, in the logical sequence of the emotions involved are: (1) the outburst of grief, and (2) since it must be, the prayer for safe passage and return. The whole matter is put quite simply and clearly by the late theorist Menander, as follows (Spengel *Rhet. Graec.* III, p. 396, 2):

Let us suppose a young man bidding farewell to a friend of like character with himself. Such an one, then, as though some monstrous and unexpected blow had fallen upon him will cry out upon (*σχετλιάσει*) Fate or the Loves, that they do not permit the bond of friendship to remain secure.

And at 397, 13:

Again you will make lament (*σχετλιάσεις*) with a view of dissuading (your friend from his purpose); then failing of that you will bring in some such utterance as this: "since then it is determined and I am overborne, let me acquiesce in your will and help it forward."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ὅπως ἐσθ' οὖν δὲ ἡμῶν νέος συνήθης προπέμπων φίλον, οὐκοῦν ὁ τοιοῦτος ἐνταῦθα ὥσπερ τι πεπονθὼς τῶν ἀτόπων καὶ ἀπροσδοκῆτων σχετλιάσει πρὸς τὴν τύχην ἢ πρὸς τοὺς ἔρωτας, οἳ μὴ συγχωροῦσι θεσμῶν φίλῃς διαμένειν βέβαιον κτλ. Again at 397, 13 σχετλιάσεις πάλιν ὡς βουληθεὶς πείσῃ, εἴτα ἀποτυχὼν, καὶ ἐπάξει λέγων· "οὐκοῦν ἐπειδὴ δέδοκται καὶ νενίκημαι, φέρε δὴ καὶ τῇ βουλῇ σου συνδράμωμεν." It is probable that a careful examination would reveal other traces of rhetorical theory, and as an example I would cite for the *σχετλιασμός* of the propempticon, Cicero *De inv.* i. 109 (under the treatment of *conquestio*): *duodecimus (locus misericordiae), per quem disiunctio deploratur ab aliquo, cum diducaris ab eo quicum libentissime vixeris, ut a parente, filio, fratre, familiari.*

The scheme that is here suggested, with its two elements of protest and, in the end, favoring prayers, is carried out in all its essentials by Ovid in *Amores* ii. 11, the theme of which is a contemplated voyage of Corinna. It is, in conformity with the erotic style and the author's manner, treated with more emotional vehemence than Horace's ode, but in structure it is closely parallel.

It begins with the complaint or *σχετλιασμός*, which Menander enjoins, the theme of which is the same as in Horace, deprecation of man's wickedness and inventiveness:

O utinam nequis remo freta longa moveret.

This is followed by a dire tale of the perils of the deep, in which Ovid does not spare the tender heart of Corinna, but brings the suggestion of death very close to her. Modern taste finds it overdone, and ancient criticism would doubtless have felt in it a violation of that *εὐφημία* which rhetorical theory demanded of the propempticon.<sup>1</sup> But if she will not be dissuaded from her purpose (and dissuasion seems to be the justification of the painful picture which he has drawn—*σχετλιάσεις ὥς βουληθεὶς πείσαι*), may the gods of the deep and favoring winds attend her—*τῇ βουλήσει συνδράμωμεν*—

At si vana ferunt volucres mea dicta procellae,  
Aequa tamen puppi sit Galatea tuae, etc.,

and the poem turns thus to a prayer for the protecting favor of the gods who rule the sea—*καταστρέψεις δὲ εἰς εὐχὴν τὸν λόγον αἰτῶν παρὰ θεῶν τὰ κάλλιστα* (Menander 399, 9). The agreement in structure between Ovid's elegy and Menander's precepts reveals that the component elements of the propempticon were defined by usage, and doubtless by theory also, before Ovid's time. Upon such twofold source of tradition both Horace and Ovid are dependent.

I shall not go on to cite and compare in detail the most elaborately composed poem of this type which has survived to us from antiquity, the *Propempticon Maecio Celeri* of Statius. It contains the same motives as we have found in the poems of Horace and Ovid: the prayer for safety, which may be called the propempticon proper, and the outburst of grief and protestation. In detail it reveals considerable imitation of Horace, and of Ovid too, but it is, I am sure, a mistake to

<sup>1</sup> Menander p. 395: *λόγος ἐστὶ μετ' εὐφημίας τινὲς προπέμπων τὸν ἀπαίροντα.*

say, with most editors of Horace, that it is merely a diffuse imitation of Horace's ode. A truer statement would be that Statius represents with most fulness and completeness the varied motives which this form had developed in the earlier practice of poets and in the precepts of the school. He covers therefore with his composition nearly all the extant examples of the type, and he appears not only as the imitator of Horace *Od.* i. 3, but also of *Epod.* 1 and of Ovid *Am.* ii. 11. Of all these he is in fact the imitator, but also of a larger literature which is lost to us.

His use of *σχετλιασμός* is more immediately motivated, and more closely connected with the propempticon itself than is Horace's. It reveals itself more directly as an outburst of grief on the loss of his friend, and thus helps to show very clearly the relation which Horace intended between the two parts of his poem. Statius represents himself as upon the departing ship overcome with grief and fear for his friend (51 ff.), to whom he clings to the last moment. From this the transition to the complaint upon man's audacity in crossing the seas is very simple and obvious:

Quis rude et abscissum miseris animantibus aequor  
Fecit iter, etc.

This passage, which corresponds to Horace's *illi robur et aes triplex*, is designated by the poet himself as a complaint (*conquestio* = *σχετλιασμός*) by the words of vs. 77, *iusta queror* and of 90 *sed merui questus*, and the whole passage might be characterized by the injunction of Menander referred to above: *σχετλιάσει πρὸς τὴν τύχην ὅτι μὴ συγχωρεῖ θεσμὸν φίλλας διαμένειν βέβαιον*. The rhetorical execution of such indictments of fortune tended to become excessive, as in the elegy of Ovid, and with their suggestions of wickedness and forebodings of danger and death they were little calculated to cheer the traveler on his way. But this is not the point of view from which they must be interpreted: rather as evidences of love and devotion, which cry out upon the nature of things as man has made them.

So much for Ovid, and perhaps for others, but Horace's reputation for tactfulness can be saved whole, I think, without having recourse to such considerations. If Horace had used explanatory titles he might perhaps have called this a dramatic lyric. Its action represents to

us the departing ship, which Horace apostrophizes—apostrophizes as a living thing, and we shall therefore think of it most naturally as a ship in motion, not an inanimate hulk tethered to a dock. It is only his solemn injunction for the safe delivery of her precious freight which is to be thought of as reaching the ears of those on board. Only then, as the ship fades from sight and is lost in the distance, does he give way to his grief at separation, and utter in reflective soliloquy the thoughts on man's audacity and impiety. They correspond, to be sure, to the conventional *conquestio* of the propempticon, but employed with how much more of art than in Ovid, or in the precepts of Menander, and with how much more of the *εὐφημία* which Professor Moore missed.

But this, it will be said, is fanciful, good enough if one is amused by it, but the sort of thing which is better kept at a safe distance from philological interpretation, or at best launched no further than to reach the ear of the docile undergraduate. And so I thought myself, until I reverted once more to the conception which I have outlined, encouraged by the fact that it was apparently shared by the poet Statius himself. At all events it is the conception of the situation which Statius creates in his propempticon, not with the reserve of Horace (which leaves room for uncertainty), but openly and withal picturesquely: The prayer to the gods of the sea and to the winds for safe convoy of the ship is heard, and Zephyrus with her favoring breeze summons the ship to depart (vs. 50). The cables are cast off, the gang-plank is let fall into the sea, and the harsh commands of the skipper as the boat gets underway put an end to embraces and farewells. But the poet will not leave his friend until the vessel is fairly in motion (*nec egrediar nisi iam currente carina* [60]), and as the ship fades in the distance the imprecations on man's impiety are uttered (61 ff.). In the midst of them the ship finally vanishes from sight:

Fugit ecce vagas ratis acta per undas  
Paulatim minor et longe servantia vincit  
Lumina.



